



City of Milpitas

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2004 State of the City Address

April 21, 2004

"A Great Beginning; Now For Our Future!"

Mayor Jose Esteves

Good evening.

Thank you, Kevin, for your wonderful introduction. Courtney, thank you for being a co-emcee with Kevin.

These two young people, Kevin and Courtney, who are serving as our emcees tonight, are excellent representatives of our youth in Milpitas

I'd also like to thank Daniel Dangca for his wonderful rendition of the Star Spangled Banner, the Milpitas High School Navy Junior ROTC for escorting our nation's flag, and Calvin Rodil for his heartfelt invocation.

And a special thank you to the Chamber of Commerce for sponsoring tonight's event.

Before I begin, I would like to recognize my colleagues on the Milpitas City Council: Vice Mayor Trish Dixon and Council members Bob Livengood, Althea Polanski, and Armando Gomez. I am grateful for your support and your teamwork as we all work for the common good of Milpitas.

I would like to especially acknowledge Vice Mayor Dixon for her exemplary work this past year. Our Vice Mayor dedicated an enormous amount of her personal time to represent Milpitas. She sat through hundreds of hours of meetings at the VTA and the library.

She proposed changes and led efforts that benefit our community. Most obvious was the proposal to restructure the VTA Board to gain greater representation for all cities in Santa Clara County. Trish was a leader in changing the way cities are represented and participate in the VTA organization. Though we don't have a permanent seat on the Board yet, I am confident that someday we will. Thank you Vice Mayor Dixon.

I am grateful for each and every one of you who are in attendance here tonight, and watching on television and on the Internet. Thank you for your interest and commitment to Milpitas' future.

Milpitas, this year, remembers and celebrates our golden anniversary as a city. Our past is filled with great leaders who made far-reaching and wise decisions. Those early leaders and local volunteers represented the best in civic values: honesty, integrity, hard work, fairness and an optimistic outlook. Some of those early leaders are with us here today.

Would Denny Weisgerber please stand up? Denny is a former Milpitas Mayor, and was one of the leaders years ago fighting the good fight to keep Milpitas an independent city. He is also the current Chair of the Milpitas Senior Advisory Commission. We owe the many men and women like Denny our respect and thanks.

Besides memorable leaders, Milpitas' past is filled with citizens and a business community that worked hard to build the strong local government we have today, our vibrant Milpitas economy, and a quality of life that is envied throughout the state and nation. Our city has always been a "melting pot" welcoming people from many backgrounds and our diversity has made our city stronger. Over the past 50 years, Milpitas constructed a strong foundation for us to continue building on.

Today when we work for our community, we also work for those who will follow after us: the men and women who will step into our shoes and continue down the stepping-stones we lay today.

Will the members of our Youth Advisory Commission and the young people who assisted with today's event please stand? Please stand up, Kevin, Courtney, Calvin, Daniel, Hemal.... These are our leaders of tomorrow. We owe them - our posterity - a community that is healthy, strong and vital. Let's thank them now for the work they are doing to grow and learn and become independent resourceful leaders of the future.

Let's continue to work together now, to model for our young people, the values and behaviors that our community was built on. Fifty years from now, maybe they will be in this very room, thanking us for our wisdom and hard work.

Before I begin outlining my vision for our immediate future, I would like to set the stage and describe what we accomplished in Milpitas' 49th year as a city.

2003 was an amazing year for Milpitas. It will be remembered not only for landmark accomplishments, but also as a year when leaders acted to protect the Milpitas community in response to the effects of the financial meltdown of outside public agencies like the state of California and the VTA.

This was one of the worst economic periods ever experienced by local government. Our County's transit agency, VTA, reduced service, increased fares, postponed construction projects and will assume millions of dollars in long term financing. The State budget crisis has negatively affected – and in some cases literally destroyed - the financial structure of public agencies and their services at all levels of government.

In this difficult fiscal environment, Milpitas walks a path few other governments can walk. During the last fiscal year, Milpitas under spent - yes; I said, "Under spent"! - its General Fund budget by \$4.5 million. This in turn, allowed the City Council to increase the General Fund reserve to a level that is only \$1 million less than the highest reserve the City has attained in the past ten years. Many many communities throughout California look on Milpitas with envy.

As Milpitas citizens we can thank our City Council for making the decisions and setting the standards to make this possible. We can also be grateful for the strong leadership, creative thinking and dedicated work of both the executive staff, and the city's hardworking employees for making the Council's goals a reality.

As you know, the City Council serves as the Board of Directors for our Redevelopment Agency. Similar to the City's record of financial strength, the Redevelopment Agency also had a landmark year. In 2003 the Redevelopment Agency Plan was amended. The amendment added 691 acres to the District, increased the tax increment cap to \$2.4 billion and significantly increased the Agency's bonded debt limit. A record breaking \$200 million in bonds were issued to restructure existing debt, fund the new library and senior center, purchase vacant property at the Elmwood jail site and pay for many Midtown street improvements along Main Street and by the Great Mall.

The proof of the City and Redevelopment Agency's aggressive and wise decisions for the financial well-being of our community were evident last year in our high financial ratings. In 2003, Standard & Poors rated the City of Milpitas' financial condition and management "AA". This is the highest rating any city in the State of California obtained last year.

Of course, a local government's influence on the economic health of the community extends beyond the boundaries of its annual budget. The City Council and I recognized this and created the Economic Development Commission in February 2003. The eleven volunteers from the business community advise the City Council on matters relating to the economic health of Milpitas.

In 2003, Milpitas received awards from the American Planning Association for the Midtown Plan. The Plan encompasses the old business district along Main Street and property around the Great Mall. It outlines how this area can evolve into a vibrant economic cornerstone of Milpitas with more housing and capital improvement projects. The first phase of the Midtown Plan is underway.

The Planning Commission and City Council approved new housing projects in the Midtown area in 2003. The first major project was Park Place, a very high-density housing development of townhouses and condominiums. Because of its location, Park Place residents will take advantage of light rail and bus transit options located nearby which, in turn, will reduce automobile traffic on our local streets. Another housing project is the innovative Apton Plaza featuring both housing and commercial uses. Combined with the new library planned across the street at the intersection of Main and Weller, Apton Plaza will form a strong community core for the north end of Main Street.

Most notable among the Midtown projects in 2003, was the Redevelopment Agency's purchase of 35 acres of the County's Elmwood jail facility on Abel Street. Not only does the purchase include the land the interim Senior Center sits on, but it will also provide for the construction of over 700 new residential units. Because Milpitas' acquisition of the County's property will prevent any expansion of the Elmwood facility, 50 years from now our young people of today may look back on this shrewd purchase as a major accomplishment that significantly benefited the Milpitas community.

Last year the City Council approved relocating the library to Main Street and eventually locating the Senior Center in the existing Library building. The building will be transformed inside so it is a functional and efficient senior center.

The Senior Center is one very exciting component of our impressive Capital Improvement Program. The City Council appointed a Subcommittee to closely guide staff and monitor progress on projects, from parks to streets. Under the CIP, the interim Senior Center on Abel Street was completed, as was the new Dog Park and four new sets of playground equipment installed at Pinewood, Hall, Dixon Landing and Foothill neighborhood parks.

The new library is also part of the CIP. The 60,000 square foot library will triple the size of our existing library and incorporate the existing historical building at Main and Weller Streets. The library project will be closely monitored and guided by our Council Library Subcommittee to ensure it is completed on time and under budget. We expect to select an architect to design the library before the end of this calendar year.

Several key highway projects were completed. Stages A and B of the 237/880 interchange were completed at a cost of \$66 million dollars. The Dixon Landing and 880 interchange neared completion in 2003 and will be fully functional later this year. Work will begin soon to replace existing masonry walls along 680 from Calaveras to north of Jacklin Rd. City staff continues to fight for funds to construct a soundwall between the Sunnyhills Neighborhood and 680.

After several years of construction on Tasman Drive, Great Mall Parkway and Capitol Avenue, the light rail project is nearing completion and will open in June. The area around the light rail station will become a hub for transit riders from throughout Silicon Valley and the region.

At the City Council's direction, city staff fully participated in the preliminary design studies of BART stations and alignment options. The extension of BART through Milpitas and into downtown San Jose and Santa Clara will create a major multi-modal transit stop for riders. With an estimated 27,000 riders a day, the Milpitas BART station will be conveniently located in close proximity to the light rail station and bus transit center.

We also initiated a pedestrian railroad overcrossing in the mid-section of Milpitas. The proposal is under study and was developed in partnership with Solectron Corp. and the Great Mall. Lastly, city staff participated in a special study to find solutions for an east/west connector between Interstate freeways 680 and 880.

One of the most important responsibilities for a city is to ensure the safety of its residents and businesses. In Milpitas we do an exemplary job responding to calls for help and preventing unsafe situations for our citizens. We often go to the aid of other public agencies, too. Last year our Fire Department sent workers to Southern California to help fight their devastating wildfires.

Also, last year, the Fire Department added 53 residents to the list of graduates for the SAFE program, or Strategic Actions For Emergencies. This is the community emergency response team program in Milpitas that trains individuals to assist their neighborhood and local authorities during and after an emergency. Last year SAFE graduates devoted over 1650 volunteer hours to Milpitas.

The Police Department's Senior Volunteers program completed its first full year of operation in 2003. 21 volunteers, all over the age of 50, donated over 6,000 hours assisting officers with activities such as child fingerprinting and conducting DUI checkpoints. 10,000 children were fingerprinted at the Great Mall.

In addition to public safety, our city provides residents with many other services. For example, an odor control action plan was developed in cooperation with multiple outside agencies. A complaint hotline was opened for residents to call and attractive public education materials were prepared.

What better way to leave a mark on Milpitas than to communicate clear values and ethics to guide our young people and clarify expectations for our present and future public officials? Last year, the Community Advisory Commission was authorized to begin outlining an ethics code, not just officials running for office, but for all Commissioners, City Council and top management city employees, too. Look for special training sessions for local political candidates and all Milpitas voters on what our community expects during the election campaigns.

We are using technology as a valuable tool for economic development, public safety and public education. Last year, the City's web site introduced live and archived streaming video of City Council and Planning Commission meetings, an online commercial real estate search, and maps for Megan's Law.

Our city is committed to education. Last year, the City Council and the Milpitas Unified School District met jointly and adopted a resolution reaffirming the partnership between the City and school district to quality education for the Milpitas community.

Our Milpitas Library is well used. Last year over 725,000 visitors checked out more than 2 million items of library material. That's a lot of books. Try visualizing this: on average, a whopping 675 items checked out each hour the library was open in 2003. No wonder our library looks so busy!

Similarly, enrollment in recreation classes dramatically increased last year by 12% to over 8,000 enrollees. It is exciting to see that Milpitas residents enthusiastically continue to learn.

Many Milpitas' residents have emigrated from other countries. Milpitas celebrates our diversity and our similarities with the rest of the world by reaching out and making connections with other municipalities in foreign countries. This past year, we began a new Sister City relationship with Dagupan City, in the Philippines. I had the honor to visit Dagupan and was delighted with the friendliness of its people and the opportunities to share knowledge and culture under our Sister City program.

This past year was a year of reflection, a period of stopping to look at the past before we venture onward. The City Council created a special citizens committee to plan how Milpitas would celebrate its 50th Anniversary of incorporation. Besides creating a celebration plan for 2004, the Committee initiated a history book project in partnership with the Milpitas Post. The book documented Milpitas' first 50 years and turned out beautifully. The Committee will initiate a time capsule project to begin later this year. We will be searching for materials that describe and illustrate the people and times of our first 50 years and today.

I've talked about our 50-year anniversary and I've described our accomplishments of last year. Now let's look to the future.

Our future is dependent on the actions we take and the character we display today. The economic downturn, the regional transportation system, the inadequate housing stock and the quality of our children's' education will have far-reaching impacts on Milpitas and its residents for years to come.

What do we want Milpitas to be like in the future? We need to reach out better to all of our residents. We need to build on our ethnic diversity and continue to make Milpitas a welcoming city for all cultures. We must fearlessly grapple with budget issues to maintain our strong fiscal position. The City Council must make courageous and wise financial decisions. These are what our near term objectives are:

As a voting member of the VTA Board, Milpitas has a very visible and influential position. We must make the tough decisions affecting services and future projects. Our staff has a prominent role in all VTA and Caltrans transportation projects.

Similarly, well-planned affordable, attractive, and convenient housing, has long-term benefits for Milpitas. We will continue to encourage new construction, especially affordably priced homes located near public transit stations. We must look for creative ways to increase our housing stock, especially the affordable part of it, to insure that our young people can afford to live and work in Milpitas.

Though our hillsides look like a prime location for additional home sites, there are significant constraints that must be considered or we will pay the price in the future. Hillside development is complicated because of concerns with geologic safety, aesthetics, and the costs to efficiently provide public services like fire protection and water. It is important to closely monitor and manage hillside development to avoid expensive liabilities for the city in the future and to protect our scenic views of these majestic hills.

The most important investment we can make for our future is in our young people. It is up to each and every one of us to influence and invest in all young people. The creativity, productivity, values, and intellect of our young people is an asset that no one can take away from us. Our investment of time and resources is the best investment we could ever make.

I challenge you to find some tangible contribution you can make to the youth of our community this year. Whether it is making a financial donation to the school district, being a mentor for a high school student, or volunteering to shelve books at the library; do it now. Do it this week. Do it before the end of the month and then keep doing it. This is your investment in the future of our community.

The Milpitas City Council has already taken my challenge. The City provides crossing guards and the DARE program. We jointly use and maintain many school fields and city facilities. We have a monthly meeting of school district and city elected officials to develop ideas and address issues together. Some potential programs we are exploring jointly now, and are part of my vision for educational investments, are to provide community college classes at the high school campus and create a pre-kindergarten reading development program.

Our new library is another part of the investment. More than one fourth of the library will be dedicated to use by our young people. We will closely evaluate the budget challenges facing the library system. It is imperative that our community maintain hours and services at the library. It is an important part of providing educational and cultural resources for our young people and population at large.

We know Milpitans are a special and diverse people. Our last 50 years demonstrate that we value independence, respect diversity, and work hard to build a community that is vibrant and attractive.

Last year at this time, I said that our people are our strength, and that has proven to be true. Milpitans are diverse and our strength comes from unifying our differences. We must magnify the values we model for our youth: respect, honesty, communication, commitment, excellence and vitality. We have a city to grow and a future to plan for. Our choices must be wise. Let's move forward together to the future and for the next 50 years! We've had a great beginning; Now for our future!

Thank you for your attention. Good evening. May God bless you all.